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ABSTRACT

This report discusses a study examining the impact of race on education policy decision-making. Though focusing primarily upon the process of change within schools, it also sought to understand the broader social and political context affecting reforms. The study was prompted by the discovery of high dropout rates and generally low achievement of Alaska Native students throughout the state. Research questions included: How do education policymakers construct their target population? How do social constructions of race and ethnicity underlie these constructions? and Are these constructions related to decision-making? Members of the Health, Education, and Social Services committees in both houses of the Alaska State Legislature were interviewed during one legislative session. Interviewees fell into three attitude groups: advocates, sympathizers, and adversaries. Results suggest that, in the United States, political ideology is fundamentally linked with racial attitudes. This study extends the theory of the social construction of target populations by incorporating the role of racial attitudes and shows that it is not possible to understand education policymaking without looking at racial constructs. It is hoped that results of this study can help policymakers and Native Alaskan peoples understand and identify conflicting ideas and beliefs that undermine sound policy decision-making. (Contains 23 references.) (RT)

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Race, Ideology and the Social Construction of Target Populations:

A New Perspective on Education Policymaking

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"Race will *always* be at the center of the American experience."

So state Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994, p. 5). Race is a central factor in many aspects of education, but ideas about the meaning of race in the U.S., and how those meanings interact with policymaking, have been relatively unexplored in the field of education policy analysis. In this paper, I discuss the findings of a study I conducted looking at the impact of race on education policy decisionmaking. After a brief explanation of how I came to this topic, I present the research questions, address the theoretical framework and methods, go over the findings and some of the data that led me to the findings, and then discuss the implications of this work.

Study Background

This study emerged from my work as part of a three-year, national study of racially mixed secondary schools attempting to reduce tracking, or ability-grouping, in part to improve the academic success of non-white students. [1] While the primary focus of this research project was the process of change within the schools, we also sought to understand the broader social and political context impacting the reforms (see Wells, Hirshberg, Oakes, & Lipton, 1995). One of the schools we looked at was in Alaska; while there I quickly learned of the high drop out rates and generally low achievement of Alaska Native students both in the local school district we were in and throughout the state.

In our research, we asked parents, teachers and local policymakers to tell us what they thought were the causes of Native student underachievement. In analyzing the responses to this

[1] This project was funded by the Lilly Endowment. Principal Investigators were Jeannie Oakes and Amy Stuart Wells.

question, we found a wide gulf between how Natives and non-Natives defined these causes. A number of non-Native teachers and school board members told us that Native parents were not involved or were not interested in their children's education, or that these parents did not provide good learning environments at home. Most of these educators, like myself, were not from Alaska originally, and talked about Native students as though they were similar to other "minority" students in the "lower 48," as they call the contiguous 48 states.

For example, one white school board member told us:

> ...the low people on the totem pole are the Natives...they are the people who manifest the traditional problems of the low people on the totem pole--the high pregnancy rate, the alcoholism rate, the drop out rate--you know all those kinds of things that...the blacks in Chicago will do for you, and the Hispanics in Los Angeles, and the blacks in Los Angeles will do. There is a great deal of insensitivity from a number of people in the white community...

When we spoke with Native parents, educators and community members, we heard a very different story. They talked about the legacy of racism and exclusion in Alaska's schools that continues today. They told stories about their parents being beaten for speaking Native languages in the past, and of current teachers not understanding or respecting traditional family structures and practices. One Native school board member noted:

> And many of our Native parents have old emotional baggage that they're carrying around from their negative experiences either from this school district or other school districts, that they have a hard time feeling comfortable in the schools.

These divergent views struck me as problematic. I began to wonder how Natives and non-Natives could see such different causes for the same phenomena. It seemed that many of the White teachers really did not understand the history, beliefs and culture of the local Native community, and instead reacted to Natives as they would to other "minority" persons elsewhere in the U.S. These misunderstandings and misperceptions of Alaska Natives appeared to be affecting Native students in a significant way.

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As I interviewed district and state level administrators and school board members, I began to see that these same misunderstandings were held by many in policymaking positions as well as at the school and classroom level. I began to wonder if these perceptions of Natives were impacting not just classroom instruction but, more fundamentally, decisions about the state's education system as a whole, in particular in terms of the needs of Alaska's Native peoples. I decided to explore this further, at both a theoretical and empirical perspective, to see how race interacts with education policymaking to affect policy decisions.

Theoretical Framework

This study was both a theory building exercise as well as an empirical investigation. As noted before, there is a great deal of research on the interplay between race and education, but little seems to focus on the influence of racial attitudes and beliefs on education policymaking. Most focuses on structural aspects of race like segregation and tracking. I ended up drawing from theories across the disciplines of sociology and political science in order to build a framework for this study, mostly using the theories of the social construction of race and the social construction of target populations.

Literature on Race and Education

I started by looking at the literature on race and education, but found it inadequate for guiding my queries. There is a great deal of research on the interplay between race and education (e.g. Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Figueroa, 1991; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993), but little seems to focus on the influence of racial attitudes and beliefs on education policymaking. Most looks instead at classroom and school-level practices and decision-making.

Conversely, when I turned to research on policymaking in education, I found that there was little which addressed issues around the meanings of race and ethnicity, as opposed to structural aspects of race (e.g. segregation and tracking). I was not able to find works that examined how racial attitudes impacted the decisions made by policymakers, although there were numerous studies demonstrating how certain education policies and practices resulted in racial stratification. The field of education policy analysis has its roots in the positivist, rationalist and quantitative traditions of disciplines like political science, systems science and economics. It typically has not been informed as much by sociological research (Boyd, 1988; Ozga, 1987). Instead, much education policy research, as in other public policy analysis, has utilized race as a fixed variable in analysis, rather than as a mediating influence. Race has been factored into equations without questioning, as though it were a constant variable similar to income or years of education. It has been seen by some researchers as having an independent impact on students and their school success, rather than being looked at as a filter through which policymakers see the world and make choices. To find more critical lenses for looking at race, I turned to the field of Sociology.

The Theory of the Social Construction of Race

Sociologists and anthropologists in the past two decades have taken new approaches to the concepts of race and ethnicity, arguing that race is not a biological or genetic phenomenon. Rather, race is a socially constructed phenomenon, shaped by history, and closely intertwined with political and economic institutions, events and processes (Ferrante & Prince Brown, 1998a; Lopez, 1994; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1994; Ragin & Hein, 1993). The meaning and salience of race are created through human interaction and interpretation, and are

continually reconstituted in the present (Lopez, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1993). In essence, whether or not it is "real," we still expect people to act a certain way according to race. This shapes how people, including policymakers, relate to others within the larger social structure; race is used to predict and explain social differences.

While they address how conceptions of race have changed over time, and how these attitudes have influenced the social, political and economic structures of this nation, the theorists looking at the social construction of race do not discuss directly how these constructions impact education policymaking. The researchers studying whiteness (e.g. Frankenberg, 1993; Fine, Powell, Weis, & Wong, 1997a; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998) and critical race theory (e.g. Tate, 1997, Solarzano, 1997) also lack this focus. While their work is fundamental for understanding how notions of race have been shaped through social and legal processes, and for uncovering the racist nature of legal institutions, these scholars do not address specifically how constructions of race influence public policymaking. I needed to expand my theoretical horizons to find this.

The Social Construction of Target Populations

I then looked to political science for research on influences on policymakers' decision-making. I found an especially promising theory on the social construction of target populations, put forth by Schneider and Ingram (1993), which argues that the characterization or image of persons or groups who are affected by public policy is socially constructed and has a powerful influence on public officials, shaping both the policy agenda and the actual design of policy. These constructions are held both by policy makers and by the general public, and they affect not only policy formulation but also how the public responds to policy decisions--whether they

approve or disapprove. While this theory seemed useful for guiding my investigation, I was surprised by its failure to address issues of race or racial attitudes.

Research Questions

I decided that to really understand the impact of race on education policymaking, I needed to use a transdisciplinary approach, merging theories across sociology and political science to create a framework for my research and guide my inquiry. I posited that extending Schneider and Ingram's theory of the social construction of target populations by determining how the social construction of race fits in would allow me to uncover how perceptions about race influence educational policymaking. I then set out to see if this theoretical framework could be explored empirically. I conducted a case study of legislators on the Health, Education and Social Services Committees of the Alaska State Legislature, asking:

1) How do education policymakers construct their target populations?
   - Specifically, what are Alaskan education policymakers' constructions of Alaska Natives as a target population?
2) How do social constructions of race and ethnicity underlie these constructions?
   - Specifically, what are Alaskan education policymakers' constructions of Alaska Natives as racial or ethnic groups? Are these constructions part of how they define Natives as policy targets? And,
3) Are these constructions related to decisionmaking? Can this be identified?

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Population & methods

The population I used in this study were the members of the Health, Education and Social Services (HESS) committees in both houses of the Alaska State Legislature during one legislative session, all but one of whom agreed to speak with me. Every legislator on the HESS committee that year was white. The data was gathered primarily through one-on-one interviews, with documents (e.g. written records of policy debates, legislation, newspapers) supplementing and triangulating the interview material. In addition, I talked with members of the State Board of Education, top administrators in the State Department of Education, and Native leaders in the legislature, on the Board of Education and on the Governor's staff to gain perspective and aid in interpretation. Each interview was conducted in a semi-structured format, and lasted in general between forty-five minutes and one hour. All interviews were taped and transcribed.

Alaska provided a nice setting for my research because there is only one "minority" population of significant size, Alaska Natives. I use this pan-ethnic term deliberately –there are actually numerous distinct peoples who are lumped together under this moniker, but it is the term used by Natives persons. Many issues in the state are often framed in "Native - White" or "Native - non-Native" terms, and emotions run high around these issues. Because of the demographics, Alaska also offers in some ways a simpler setting than elsewhere in the U.S., and perhaps, because of the long-standing controversies around Native rights and "Indian Country" a more stark setting.

Also, state legislators in Alaska have somewhat more direct influence on local education policy, at least in rural Alaska, than in most states like Oregon or California. Rural education is funded completely by the state, and there are no local contributions, while urban schools are funded by a combination of local and state funds. Therefore legislative decisions often have

more direct impact, as legislators can decide whether to fund high schools in rural communities or close them, decisions that in most other parts of the country, and in urban Alaska, are made by local school boards

Still, while Alaska provided a good location for my research, this work could have been, and I believe should be done with other populations of policymakers and policy targets.

Data Analysis

For this study, I used case study methodology. Case study is a method that is appropriate for building theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). It is also suitable for exploring education policymakers' constructions of their target populations. In this study, my case was the policymakers' constructions, and uncovering these constructions required getting at policymakers' beliefs about who Alaska Natives are, and what they feel are the best or most appropriate education policies for these peoples. Survey research methods or document analysis alone could not provide the rich, complex data necessary to conduct this study. Schneider and Ingram (1993) posit that policymakers' social constructions of target populations can be ascertained from interviews and surveys as well as through the study of texts, statutes, media, speeches and so on. In addition, interview material, when combined with other data sources, is a very rich source of information that can reveal complexities and contradictions in the internal structures of educational policy-making that macro-level studies miss or gloss over (Ozga, 1987).

In my interviews I asked open-ended questions. Broadly, I asked about the legislators' backgrounds, including when they arrived in Alaska, what experiences they had working or interacting with Alaska Natives, how they learned about Natives and the issues impacting them, and what they saw as the major causes of Native student underachievement. I also asked them to

tell me about specific policies aimed at Native students, about the involvement of Native parents and communities in education, and asked their opinion of bilingual and multicultural education.

All of my findings emerged from the interviews themselves. I coded the transcripts based on themes that came up in the interviews, and developed lists of items comprised of policymakers' constructions of Natives and attitudes about issues. This was an "iterative" process where I made multiple cuts of the data and recoded these to see what emerged. I also developed a "checklist matrix" with information on the legislators, such as their background, political party, length of residence in Alaska and so forth, and to see if patterns in the conceptual matrix matched any patterns in these characteristics. I focused on two specific policy issues that are very contentious in Alaska, bilingual education and funding for rural education, to illuminate relationships between policy positions and policymakers' constructions of Natives.

Findings

In my analysis, I found that policymakers' social constructions of target populations were related to the policy positions they took, and that the social construction of race is indeed a part of policymakers' social constructions of target populations. This connection explained in part by political ideology, when the tight link between political ideology and racial attitudes is made explicit, as is done by theorists looking at both the social construction of race (Omi & Winant, 1993 & 1994) and at political party development in the U.S. (e.g., Carmines & Stimson, 1989). The data I collected led me to these conclusions, and illustrates this theoretical connection, as I will now show.

As I delved in the data, the legislators fell into three groups. These are rough categories, and fluid groupings. The borders are blurry – on some issues or opinions the legislators might fit

better in a group other than that indicated above. Based on their descriptions of their relationships with and attitudes about Natives in general, as well as their stated positions and actions on specific education policy issues two clusters quickly emerged: those who presented attitudes and policy positions which mirrored those of most of the Native peoples I interviewed, and those who seemed to hold ideas that are quite different from those of the Native respondents. These two groups I refer to as the Advocates and the Adversaries. The third group displayed attitudes that fell between the Advocates and the Adversaries. I called them Sympathizers.

The Advocates	The Sympathizers		The Adversaries
Tim Rogers	Bob Forman	Roger Silven	Hugh Gannett
Matt Allen	Alan Gray	Sally Longworth	George Leonard
Nancy Greenway	Lois Andrews	Bill Walters	

The Advocates

All of the Advocates were Democrats, while all of the remaining legislators were Republicans. I selected the name "Advocates" for those legislators who described themselves as actively representing the interests of Alaska Natives. They were the only group that took an explicitly pro-rural, pro-Native stance. Tim Rogers noted:

> ...I try to be less parochial than some legislators, I never took an oath to downtown Anchorage, I took an oath to the State of Alaska, and I'm often you know called by some of the racists in my district, there aren't many in my district, but they're there, you know I'm called "Native Lover"... But you know I often vote with the rural interests, and I often vote, I mean I always vote for subsistence hunting and fishing rights... And so I'm often derided and I lose some votes in my district for voting for rural interests and for Native interests, frankly.
> Tim Rogers – Advocates

The group that I called "Advocates" saw Natives as being culturally different from non-Natives, but did not see this as a negative, but rather as something to be embraced. Their interpretations of the educational and social issues facing Alaska Natives were quite similar to those expressed by Native persons. They identified racism as a problem in the public education

system, and cited the historic oppression of Native peoples as one reason for the current social and economic difficulties in Native communities. They saw one major cause of Native student failure resulting from a cultural mismatch in which the schools were not responsive to Native culture, rather than seeing the problem as arising from within Natives themselves. Nancy Greenway commented:

> ...a lot of the problems in education in this state are viewed to be in rural Alaska. And you know part of it is we use Caucasian White Man's tests from New Jersey to measure the progress in Unalakleet, and those kids don't know about cows and dairies and stuff like that but they know about seals and salmon and they never get tested on that. So I always, I know there's a lot of talk about how miserable the rural kids are doing on the tests and, I don't, I don't think that's a valid measure, especially as the only measure of how they are doing. But that's a problem.

As a result, they indicated that schools needed to change their curriculum, tests, and approaches to teaching, and hire more Native teachers, in order to rectify the problems. Furthermore, unlike any of the other legislators, they all identified racism as a problem within the Legislature.

Likewise, their policy positions for the most part mirrored those promoted by most of the Native leaders I interviewed, as well as by the major Alaska Native advocacy organizations, and by research and opinion pieces written by academics and Native leaders. They generally supported bilingual education programs and enhanced funding for secondary schools in rural Alaska.

The Adversaries

In contrast, the Adversaries spoke of Natives and Native issues in ways that were oppositional or even hostile, hence the moniker. They identified a lack of motivation or work ethic as underlying high Native failure rates in school, and implied that the solution to the situation was for Natives to change and assimilate, by leaving their villages, as opposed to

having educational institutions change. In response to my asking why he thought Native students in rural Alaska did worse than students in urban areas, George Leonard replied:

> When you get out into some of these, the bush areas, you know some of the cultural differences can be greatly magnified. When you get out of... the...cash economy that you and I think about, it's not so much you get out of the cash economy but you get out of the...you quickly get away from the, the steady work type of culture, the Puritan work ethic, you get away from it... and we have that in Alaska in, in general everywhere, because we have an awful lot of seasonal employment, well this is even more exaggerated out in the bush.

The Adversaries were opposed to bilingual education and highly critical of rural secondary schools. Norm Gannett commented:

> ... the most successful group of Alaska Native leaders came out of the boarding school programs at Mt. Edgecumb... when they exported our students out of the town, we had the Molly Hootch settlement case, it created high schools and other schools in small communities, it probably ruined, the kids lost their opportunity to go out of their village and learn what the rest of the world was like, both in the Native and white cultures and the United States and the world, and get a potentially better education at those schools. They were separated from their families which was unfortunate...I would believe in boarding schools, I don't think every small community should have a secondary education school near the community they should you know consolidate, and they can export, import whatever I think you need to look at those kinds of things.

The Sympathizers

The third group of legislators was less easy to define – their attitudes and opinions ran along a continuum that did not easily lend itself to classification, nor to placement in one of the other two categories. This group proved to be not only the most difficult to understand, but also the most interesting in driving my theoretical understandings of what I was seeing.

They all seemed to be sympathetic towards Alaska Natives and yet took policy positions that often were contrary to those supported by many Natives. And so, I called them the Sympathizers. This group presented a mixed bag of familiarity with Natives--some demonstrating a deep appreciation for the different Native cultures, others less so. In general,

they expressed concern over the loss of Native culture, and yet at the same time articulated the attitude that Natives should assimilate into the mainstream culture. As Alan Gray noted:

> It's just, it's just their lifestyle, it's not their culture to sit on their butts in a school, to, in hopes of getting a job where they sit on their butts some more for the rest of their lives or until they retire. The monetary situation is still not a part of their culture. The carrying a wallet and i.d.s with cash in it to go to the store, give me this, give me that, that, that's just not their lifestyle. So, it's taking a long time for the assimilation, that process to...to develop. And it's, it's progressing, more and more. And it's, it has progressed to...a lot. It, there's been a lot of improvement in the 30 years that I've seen it.

Several also noted that while it was important to understand Natives and their cultures better, they believed that Alaska Natives "wanted the same thing" or had the same goals and purposes for education and that "The Best" in education meant the same thing to all Natives and Whites, an attitude that wasn't mirrored by many of the Natives I spoke with. Bill Walters argued: "...you know they want to love their children, they wanna give the best to their children, you know so you've got to start from that basis, that we're all, we're all the same, we all want the same thing."

Inconsistencies in attitudes and policy positions were most noticeable in this group, and in some cases their statements to me and legislative actions were contradictory. For example, many Sympathizers appeared to be sympathetic toward Native efforts to maintain traditional practices and indigenous languages, and yet opposed funding for rural village schools and bilingual education programs. In short, they often mentioned the same issues, concerns and experiences as the Advocates but then interpreted and acted upon them in a very different way.

One of the Sympathizers, Bob Forman, exemplified the contradictions I saw in this group. He offered the most detailed descriptions of the diversity amongst Alaska's Native peoples of any of the legislators I spoke with. But he often couched his descriptions of the differences in political terms, interpreting the actions of Natives not as being in the interest of

preserving culture or lifestyle but rather for personal gains or other more negative motivations. He repeatedly differentiated between the Eskimos of the North Slope, who supported exploitation of natural resources in a wilderness preserve, and those who, as he put it, did not want to "make their contribution" to state coffers.

In response to my query about whether legislators understood the diversity among Native peoples he responded that as a collective group they did, but added:

> And I hope this comes out the way I mean it, I'm not sure the Native people understand the diversity of, I mean certainly if you have a Gwich'in and a Yu'pik sit down and have a discussion about resource development and they're going to be looking at it very differently. But that isn't to say they don't understand the difference, they may not share as many common goals as someone might who views the Natives as monolithic might think they would. We had AFN who, they passed an amendment this spring, a resolution supporting development and it was a huge controversy, they've been arguing about that.

When I then responded that I had heard a lot of people discuss Natives in a monolithic way he added:

> Yeah, but in a, well, I guess that's why I said I've traveled, because I, I really do see great differences, I mean look at, the North Slope who lobbies for opening ANWR, and Gwich'ins, 300 miles away, who are fighting, retrenchment to keep it close, they'll accept any state money that comes from somewhere else they just don't want to make their contribution.

Forman also had a cynical attitude toward Natives who had registered as tribe members in the early 1970s. He did not see this as a result of lessening racism or increasing pride in their heritage, but rather as a means to gaining wealth from the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, stating: "...For a long time, before the Alaska Native Claims Settlement, there were a lot of people who would've been non-Native until it became an economic advantage and then they acknowledged their Native heritage." His sentiment is in direct opposition to the history told to me by a half Philipina, half Native woman. She explained that when she was young, because of

severe discrimination against Natives, it wasn't "good" to be Native. Therefore she and her familiy called themselves Philipinas, not Tlingits.

Forman was concerned that rural education spending was being used to bolster the economy of villages artificially, as opposed to providing opportunities for Natives to get a high school diploma in their villages instead of having to attend boarding school. I commented that I had just received the State Department of Education study on rural education. He encouraged me to read it, and added:

> What purpose, now where we differ in the Native - non-Native is what purpose do we want the schools to serve, and that doesn't always involve education, it involves basketball courts, it involves three of the five jobs that are available, it involves being significant in matter and counting because it involves creating an artificial economic island.

I mentioned that one person explained to me that the public school may be only source of electricity in a village. He commented: "Water, maybe. And should we be using education to supply electricity, water or jobs, that's a whole other story." While Forman did not say to me directly that he thought some rural schools should be closed, he did make that point during a Health, Education and Social Services Committee meeting a few weeks before my visit. Then he argued that the state needed to "streamline and consolidate or even close small schools that aren't educationally or economically viable. He also expressed this sentiment in a newspaper interview, noting "We simply don't have the money to keep so many rural schools open." He argued that "Every dollar that the state spends in small rural schools deprives Native students, the majority of whom live in Anchorage or Fairbanks."

Forman presented a mixed bag of attitudes on bilingual education. He did not support an English as an Only Language initiative that had been introduced in Alaska, and yet stated that there was value in there being a "common language" for all Alaskans. He even indicated that he

saw some good in the measure, though he acknowledged that it would cause more hurt than benefit. He also did not mention the preservation of Native cultures as being a reason to oppose the initiative:

> And you know that "no dogs no Natives" stuff, that isn't too terribly old. We just had a bill that would establish English as the official language. We did nothing but irritate people. It was so watered down it probably would have passed, but I couldn't support it. I taught communications and semantics, you know language is the purveyor of our culture, the reason we have still one country and haven't Balkanized is the common language. So I understand the value of that, but it wasn't that long ago that Native kids were punished for speaking Native languages, and that dredges up such bitter memories that why do we need this bill, it could accomplish that much good maybe and this much hard feelings (showing small then big distances with hands).

While he understood language to be the purveyor of culture, Forman did not identify the preservation of Native languages, so that Natives could maintain their own cultures, as something that was as valuable as mandating the use of English to promote the non-Native culture. He also seemed concerned about the potential for bilingual education to result in the use of non-standard English in the classroom.

Bob Forman, and the Sympathizers as a whole, consistently identified issues of importance to Alaska Natives and then drew conclusions or interpretations that were in opposition to those offered by Natives. This group forced me to revisit the literature on the social construction of race and the social construction of target populations to try to understand what I was seeing, that the members of this amorphous group would describe issues or concerns in ways similar to the Advocates or in a few instances the Adversaries, and then come up with very different interpretations of the same phenomena. As I mentioned earlier, and will discuss below, political ideology explained how these policymakers constructions of race were impacting their constructions of Alaska Natives as policy targets.

Conclusion

Briefly, to summarize this data, the three legislator groupings—Advocates, Sympathizers and Adversaries—emerged from the views expressed by the legislators themselves. The Advocates talked about Natives from a very supportive perspective. They encouraged the maintenance of Native culture, language and community, and identified problems in institutions as primary reasons for Native difficulties in schools, rather than the culture or actions of Natives themselves. Adversaries, in contrast, displayed almost hostile attitudes toward Natives, and blamed Natives and their culture for the failure to succeed in schools. They opposed maintaining small rural schools as well as the operation of bilingual education programs.

Finally, the Sympathizers displayed views that fell in between the two groups. While some indicated that Natives needed to assimilate more to succeed, others saw value in Natives retaining language and cultural practices, but saw conflict between institutions and Native culture. Unlike the Advocates, these Sympathizers on the whole did not propose changing the tests or school structure to accommodate Natives, but as opposed to the Adversaries they also did not argue that Natives should give up their language or cultural practices entirely.

Given this data, it does seem as though social constructions of target populations are related to policy positions of policy makers, as Schneider and Ingram (1993) have theorized. Moreover, it appears that racial attitudes and constructions are a piece of this puzzle; Alaska Natives are a racially defined group, and there were distinct differences in both how the members of the three groups talked about Natives and the positions they took on policy issues pertaining to race.

It seems evident that political ideology was mediating the way legislators interpreted similar experiences and understandings, leading them to different conclusions. Political ideology

is an important factor in all policymaking, including for education. Ideology impacts policymaking as the experiences and values of those in positions of power shape their policy agenda. Different ideologies lead to distinct policy agendas. Indeed, Schneider and Ingram (1993) do argue that political ideology is one of the influences on policymakers' social constructions of target populations. However they do not address how political ideology or the social construction of race impact the social construction of target populations. I had to turn back to the research on the social construction of race, and then to other theorists in political science to find a way to understand this.

In the end, the explanation of what this data shows is that in the United States, political ideology is fundamentally linked with racial attitudes. Howard Winant (1994, 1997) treats the social construction of race and political ideology as fundamentally the same phenomenon. He states, "Indeed, the very meaning of political labels such as conservative, liberal, and radical has been transformed by ongoing debates about race, including those on affirmative action, social welfare policy, and immigration reform" (Winant, 1994, p. 174).

Political labels like conservative, neo-conservative, liberal and radical can be linked directly with beliefs about race and equity in this country as well as with policy positions. For example, differences in support or opposition for affirmative action or other equity remedies fall out along these ideological lines. These political labels could also be attached to the Adversaries, Sympathizers and Advocates; their discussions of Alaska Natives and their policy positions led me to these groupings, and yet when I looked at their political party affiliations and how they self-identified politically, the Advocates, Sympathizers and Adversaries also split on party lines and, within the Republicans, on being moderates or conservatives.

Winant is in agreement with the Critical Race Theorists, who argue that race is central to the larger social, economic and political structures of the United States (Solorzano, 1997; Taylor, 1998). However, while linking race and political ideology in the U.S., the theorists looking at the social construction of race still don't provide a guide to *how* race impacts the policymaking process. Howard Winant shows that there is a relationship between racial attitudes and political ideology, but doesn't explain the role these attitudes play in policymaking. The critical race theorists likewise show how race underlies the fundamental structure of the legal and social systems in the United States but fail to demonstrate how political ideology based on these racialized structures impacts policy decisions. At the same time, Schneider and Ingram (1993) fail to address how race acts as a mediator for these social constructions of policy targets and the resultant decision-making. However, acknowledging that political ideology is part of the picture, as Schneider and Ingram do, and that political ideology is fundamentally racialized, as do critical race theory and the social construction of race, a link is made between the two theories. Political ideology is the mediator for understanding the role the social construction of race plays in policymakers' social constructions of their target populations. It must be emphasized that political ideology in this context does not refer only to positions on the policy spectrum, e.g., conservative, liberal or radical, but also is as Winant describes it, racial attitudes and beliefs.

Neither Winant nor the Critical Race Theorists explain how race and political ideology came to be linked. For this, I again looked at the literature on whiteness, as well as a prominent work in the field of political science. Researchers studying Whiteness identify race as impacting political ideology in the United States. For example, Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) contend that race has served a role in defining political ideologies on both the right and the left. They note that right-wing leaders, in response to the civil rights movement, have created a form of

identity politics based on whiteness, which promotes values like the Eurocentric cultural canon, "family values," and English-as-the-only-language legislation.

However, the most thorough study of how race impacts political ideology in the United States was conducted by Carmines and Stimson (1989). In their work *Issue Evolution: Race and The Transformation of American Politics,* Carmines and Stimson contend that race is transforming American politics. They argue that in trying to understand how the diverse aspects of American political life are connected "race is the connector" (p. xiv). Moreover, they call race "a transforming element in the political ideologies" (p. xv). In an analysis of presidential platforms, political party platforms, congressional votes and public voting behavior, Carmines and Stimson determined that in the two decades following the Civil Rights movement, racial concerns became central to the national political agenda (muck like Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1988). They contend that a partisan transformation based on racial issues occurred during this time period, and resulted in the Democratic party coming to represent racial liberalism, and the Republican party becoming known for racial conservatism. They call this the "ideological fusion of racial with other political beliefs" (p. 119).

Indeed they found that "by 1972 race had become 'nationalized' as a central issue in American politics, giving shape and form to many voters' political belief systems" (p. 131). Functionally, this means that, "not only do racial attitudes help to perform the structuring functions often associated with the liberal/conservative dimensions, but much of the meaning of this ideological dimension is apparently racial in nature" (p. 132). Finally, they state that, "racial matters are central to the apparent connotation of the terms of left/right discourse" (p. 135). The end result is that political ideology and the social construction of race are now, as Winant (1994, 1997) contends, one and the same. Carmines and Stimson write: "Racial attitudes are now

tightly linked to prevailing political ideology. Once separable, it is now all but inconceivable to be a liberal and not a racial liberal or to be a conservative and not oppose activist racial policies" (p.185).

Thus, political ideology helps explain how the Sympathizers, all moderate Republicans, could maintain seemingly contradictory stances on issues impacting Alaska Natives. For instance, despite their professed understanding of the importance of village life to Natives, the Sympathizers' fundamental belief in meritocracy, assimilation, as well as their denial of the salience of racial differences would keep them from advocating for real structural changes to improve rural educational opportunities. Such reforms would require extra resources for Native communities and result in economically and socially strong groups that were not assimilated into the mainstream culture. Such outcomes would be anathema to neo-conservatives or moderate Republicans.

In Alaska, it is possible to see concrete examples of how race is a fundamental part of the political, economic and social structure. Many of the policymakers I interviewed argued that the rural-urban divide, rather than Natives versus non-Natives, was the fundamental conflict in Alaska. They did not want to acknowledge, or could not see, the central role of race in the political and social structure of their state, and the nation at large. However, this divide *is* inherently Native versus non-Native. For one, the demographics of the state inherently make this a racial issue. Although large numbers of Natives live in urban areas, the villages are predominantly Native, while urban communities are predominantly non-Native. In 1999, the populations of the two rural boroughs and four rural census areas were over 75 percent American Indian/Alaska Native. At the same time, the residents in the eight urban or suburban boroughs and three similar census areas (all on the "railbelt", e.g., communities from Fairbanks down to

Anchorage, as well as the Kenai Peninsula, and the capital, Juneau), were over 75 percent non-Native. While Anchorage had the largest number of American Indians and Alaska Natives of any area in the state, these persons still only accounted for 8% of the borough's population. These figures are very similar to those from the 1990 census (Williams, 2000). But aside from the demographics, the very issues that comprise the rural-urban split – subsistence, control and exploitation of natural resources, taxation, rural education costs – all divide along Native and non-Native lines, and have their roots in the history of relations between Natives and the United States government. It is not possible to untangle or separate the rural-urban divide from the Native/non-Native dichotomy; they are inherently intertwined.

The situation in Alaska is emblematic of the phenomena described by critical race theory and the theory of the social construction of race, that race underlies all of the social and political structures in the United States. It impacts the decisions made by policymakers, as well as response to these decisions in the broader public arena. It may be impossible to determine exactly how much a legislator's construction of Alaska Natives influences policy decisions, relative to other influences like constituent concerns, lobbyists or political party positions, or to what degree constructions of race and ethnicity impact a policymaker's perceptions of Natives versus the other factors that contribute to constructions of target populations. Nonetheless, these constructions have a relationship to policy positions. It certainly is not possible to understand why policymakers make the choices they do, about education as well as other important public policies, without looking at the impact of social constructions of race as a part of the social constructions of target populations.

Implications of the Research

There are two major areas in which this study is important; the first is in the realm of extending theory, while the second is in the possibility of influencing and improving the policymaking process. This study extends the theory of the social construction of target populations by incorporating a missing piece: the role of racial attitudes, as defined by the theory of the social construction of race. It also represents an early attempt at empirically identifying these constructions and their connections to actual policy decisions. In addition, this work offers a critical link between theories on the social constructions of race and ethnicity and education policy studies, providing a new approach to understanding the way race influences education policymaking.

But on a more practical level, I would argue that my findings show that it is not possible to understand education policymaking without looking at racial constructs. Despite the civil rights gains of the last forty years, the majority of public policy makers in the nation are white, and many of them fail to take a critical look at how their own racial attitudes are influencing the decisions they make. Many theorists studying race, like bell hooks (1993), Nitza Hidalgo (1993), Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg (1998), and Ruth Frankenberg (1993), believe that whites need to deconstruct both their own attitudes and the concept of whiteness before they can understanding the diverse communities for whom they create programs and policies. This work may serve to inform this process, and hopefully create a model for further research into policymakers' social constructions of other racial groups who are policy target populations.

This study also has specific relevance for the education of indigenous peoples in Alaska. By illuminating policymakers' constructions and identifying how these are related to policy decisions, this research may create opportunities for Native peoples to identify policymakers'

ideas and beliefs which conflict with their own. It could then open up opportunities for Native outreach to, and education of these policymakers. This hopefully can lead to a productive dialogue and the improvement of educational opportunities for all students in Alaska.

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